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THE SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF DES MOINES, IOWA, AS CARRIED OUT AT NORTH HIGH SCHOOL

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by

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THE SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF DES MOINES, IOWA, AS CARRIED OUT AT NORTH HIGH SCHOOL

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The provision of educational experiences suitable for retarded children is one of the problems every school system faces. In the Des Moines Public Schools attention has been given to this problem since 1914. One part of this program has been special classes for the mentally retarded at the tenth grade level at two of the high schools. The administrators and teachers of the Department of Pupil Adjustment of the Des Moines Public Schools are aware of the necessity to maintain a special education program which will strive to meet the needs of the participants. Because of this awareness a committee representing the various levels of education was formed to review the present system. The writer was appointed to review the system at the secondary level.

It should be noted that the term "special" as used in this report is synonymous with the term "retarded" as it is usually used. This special program as carried out at North High School was the object of this study.

I. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The special program for retarded children at North High School was inaugurated in the fall of 1947. Since that time there has been little change or review of the program. The writer has been a teacher in the program for five years

and believed that a review of the program and its effectiveness should be made. The Department of Pupil Adjustment of the Des Moines Public Schools, the administrative agency involved, also expressed interest in such a review.

Purpose of the study. It was therefore the purpose of this study to review the operation of the special program for retarded children at North High School, to determine how satisfactorily it was operating, and to make recommendations to improve its effectiveness, if such was found necessary.

Definition of terms. To clarify and identify some of the general terms used in this study the following definitions will apply.[1]

Special Education: That area of education within the Des Moines Public Schools that applies to those students with and IQ of between 55 and 79.

Mentally Retarded: Those children with an IQ below 79.

Department of Pupil Adjustment: The Department within the Des Moines Public Schools that has jurisdiction over the Special Education Program.

Special: Those students classed as mentally retarded and participating in the Special Education Program.

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[1]Department of Pupil Adjustment, Manual For Teachers of Special Classes for Retarded Pupils (Des Moines Public Schools, Des Moines, Iowa, 1950), pp. 5, 7, 8, 9.

Regular: Those students and courses not associated with the special education program.

II. PROCEDURE

The first step was to secure permission to make this study from the Department of Pupil Adjustment of the Des Moines Public Schools. This was readily granted.

The literature was then surveyed to obtain characteristics of retarded children and suggestions for their education. Also, other school systems were written for information about programs for the retarded that may be in existence. There was very little of satisfaction from this.

Conferences with the Director of the Department of Pupil Adjustment and with the Director of Secondary Education for the Des Moines Public Schools were held, at which time a general picture of the whole program for special students was secured. This was followed by conferences with many school personnel who had long been working in the special program in Des Moines.

Conferences with the principal of North High School and other administrative personnel and teachers were held to draw up the statement about the program at North High School. The records there were made available for this study.

In addition to the office records, further information about the special students were secured from a series of interviews with these students during the 1956-1957 school year.

The results of the above procedure were then presented as follows: Chapter II, the education of the special (retarded) student; Chapter III, the special program in the Des Moines Public Schools; Chapter IV, the special student at North High School.

CHAPTER II

EDUCATION OF THE SPECIAL STUDENT

This chapter deals with two major areas which are basic to the problems that confront educators and laymen alike in their attempts to create optimum educational situations for children. The first section is concerned with the nature of the special student and the second section deals with the educational provisions for him.

Much information relative to the nature of the special student was available from studies on this subject as reported in periodicals and books. Personal interviews and teachers' manuals were an important source of information dealing with the education of the special student.

I. NATURE OF THE SPECIAL STUDENT

"In every sample of one hundred pupils selected at random from the elementary schools of the nation there are at least twenty who must be regarded as slow learners," according to Featherstone.[1] In public education there is a major problem in identifying and educating this twenty per cent.

What are the characteristics of a "slow learner"? This chapter is concerned with the answer to this question under the

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[1]William B. Featherstone, Teaching the Slow Learner (New York: Bureau of Publications, Columbia University, 1951), p. vii.

following headings: physical characteristics, mental characteristics, and personality and adjustment.

Physical Characteristics

The physical side of the mentally retarded student is often a contributing factor to his mental maladjustment. Generally speaking the special students are of small stature in weight and height when compared with the normal child. They often tend to be less well proportioned than the normal child; however, when they are heavy or tall, then tend to be exceptionally obese or unusually tall.

> In my own experiences students have been as tall as six feet three inches and as short as five feet three inches. The weight scale has ranged from ninety-five pounds to two hundred and forty pounds.[1]

Featherstone has pointed to similar tendencies to deviate from the normal in matters of health:

> In matters of health...slow learning children as a group differ more conspicuously from average children. Defects of hearing and speech, malnutrition, defective tonsils, adenoids, and defects of vision are considerably more frequent than among average children.[2]

Cyril Burt has carried this further:

> The most common condition appears to be a child who is suffering or has suffered during his pre-school life not from any single well-defined complaint, but from a plurality of minor troubles, all contriving to manifest

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[1]F. J. Daly and L. C. Cain, Mentally Retarded Students in California Secondary Schools (Sacramento: California State Department of Education, 1953), p. 19.

[2]Featherstone, op. cit., p. 4.

> and maintain a lowered state of bodily vitality. The outstanding condition is what is often vaguely termed as general debility, partly no doubt innate, and partly due to various post-natal and environmental conditions.[1]

It was pointed out in a study of the mentally retarded students in California secondary schools that, "Poor health has been known to limit the functioning of adolescents so seriously that they manifest symptoms of mental retardation which often disappear when the physical defects are corrected."[2]

An interview with the personnel of the health service at North High School revealed the following about the health of the special students. This student has shown a marked need for the health attention that the school can give. This, of course, consists of such provisions as rest when a headache occurs or use of a heat lamp for certain neuro-muscular ailments. An examination of health records at North High School showed that the other health and physical factors that seem to be most dominant in the mentally-retarded group are the condition of the eyes, ears, and teeth. A span of three years - 1954, 1955, and 1956 - showed the following per cent of defects with the seventy-eight students enrolled in the special education classes during those years. Eye defects (correctable with

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[1]Cyril Burt, The Backward Child (New York: D. Appleton Co., 1947), p. 206.

[2]Daly and Cain, op. cit., p. 19.

glasses), 22 per cent; hearing loss (moderate to serious), 3 per cent; hearing loss (slight) 18 per cent; dental defects, 56 per cent. These figures were drawn from the records of student examinations at North High School. The possibility that the visiting physician could not determine the complete physical conditions of students in the time span of the examinations must be considered in accepting these data.

It is thus clear that the physical and health problem of the special student required constant observation. Although many facilities tend to be inadequate with respect to aiding the special student, every physical handicap that can be overcome increases a student's chance to make the most of his intellectual capacity, and, of course, contribute to his comfort and happiness.

Mental Characteristics

The mental make-up of the special or retarded student is generally characterized in some or all of the following areas. The special student usually exhibits inferior perceptive powers. They often lack the ability to define, analyze and distinguish differences. They prove to be very limited in reasoning ability and in dealing with problem situations. In fact, it is because of this inferior reasoning ability that retarded children are retarded.[1] As reasoning ability is considered to be an innate

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[1]Elise Martens, Guide to Curriculum Adjustment for Mentally Retarded Children, United States Office of Education, Bulletin 11 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1936), p. 6.

capacity, it is debatable how much improvement of reasoning may be brought about by instruction. The memory span of the retarded child is often very short.

A study conducted at the University of Minnesota by H. Dowell and W. L. Carson in 1952 revealed the following mental assets and liabilities of retarded students. Liabilities included lack of ingenuity and imagination, lack of concentration and attention, reading disability, defective auditory memory, inadequate vocabulary, lack of eye-hand coordination, inability to note details and slow reaction time, among others. The greatest assets of the retarded student were vocabulary (combination auditory and visual impressions), visual memory, reasoning in concrete situations only and manipulative ability.[1]

Individual mental characteristics evident in the retarded student are, generally, easy to detect, but often difficult to improve upon because of this lack of innate ability to reason. The mentally retarded student, the writer notes, is quite often under severe tension in courses of an academic nature. It might be of more value to this student to channel his efforts more in keeping with his abilities.

Personality and Adjustment

Featherstone has generalized as follows about the

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[1]H. Dowell and W. L. Carson, Understanding the Mentally Retarded (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1952), pp. 18-21.

personality and adjustment of the slow learner:

> It is widely believed that slow learners as a group have poor personalities and are less well adjusted than average or bright pupils, but there is little conclusive evidence to support such a belief. Studies of the adjustment of groups of slow learners, as compared with bright groups indicate that the bright pupils are a little better adjusted and the slow learners a little less well adjusted than normal, but the differences, while statistically significant, are small. One's personality, of course, is an extremely complex matter and is incapable of being described adequately in such simple terms as good, fair, poor, and the like.[1]

Various attempts have been made to analyze the personality of the mentally retarded according to certain specific attributes. One of these studies[2] showed the mentally retarded revealed the attributes of self-distrust, physical timidity, dependence and deference. Bright students, on the other hand, were the leaders with respect to leadership, rivalry, concentration, zest, creativity, courage, self-defense, and other generally-desirable characteristics. This study pointed out, however, that a marked difference was revealed in only a few attributes, and many of them showed no differences at all. For example, bluffing, cooperation, selfishness, obedience, kindliness, gregariousness, emotionality, antagonism, reticence, generosity, defensiveness, and exclusiveness showed no change

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[1]Featherstone, op. cit., p. vii.

[2]G. Lightfoot, Characteristics of Bright and Dull Children (New York: Bureau of Publications, Columbia University, 1951), pp. 64, 65.

or significant differences between the bright and mentally retarded child.

The slow learner does not lack the ability to develop and maintain outstanding habits of character and personality.

Featherstone has stated further about the personality development of the retarded child as it shows itself in the classroom:

> Slow-learning children are very often alleged to be uncommonly lazy, and with good reason, but one should be careful not to assume that laziness is constitutional. Laziness is frequently due to ill health, and even more frequently to educational maladjustment. Poor powers of attention are also noted more frequently among slow learning children than among average children. Again, one must avoid the easy generalization that inattention is a native defect, incapable of improvement. Attention is only partially a matter of mental resources.[1]

Perhaps the writer's work with the special student at North High School over a five-year period has resulted in some generalizations about this kind of student which illustrates the personality characteristics reported above. He has found that the special students are quick to form cliques by their own standards of dress, though they resent any reference to "special" education. It is necessary to carry out classroom procedures similar to those in "regular" classes. It has not been uncommon for the writer to issue a regular English textbook to the special class for the students to carry about the halls. Limited use can be made of this book in teaching, but the important thing that it does is to provide the special student

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[1]Featherstone, loc. cit.

with a sense of being like other students and not being labeled by carrying a special and simple book. The special student who is able to take part in the athletic program with success tries, often in vain, to disassociate himself from the "special" group. He will slip quietly into homeroom and often isolate himself from the other students. He likes individual attention in the classroom and tries to appear intelligent.

II. EDUCATION OF THE SPECIAL STUDENT

When discussing provisions for the education of the special or retarded student, it must be recognized that the general purposes of public education will apply to him as to others. Also, many of the special services and activities in a school will apply to him as to others. The problem arises in determining how to realize the objectives with this student; how to make the services and activities as useful as possible to his development because of the ways in which he differs from the normal. Featherstone pointed out this difficulty quite plainly when he wrote:

> 1. There are no means by which a conventional curriculum made up of such academic subjects as English, mathematics, science, history, stenography, bookkeeping, and the like can be taught to slow learners.
>
> 2. It is impossible to change the curriculum enough to meet the needs of slow learners without changing the standards for marking, grades, promotion, and graduation.
>
> 3. It is impossible to develop a suitable curriculum for slow-learning youth on the basis of the pattern or design of the conventional subject organized curriculum.[1]

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[1] Ibid., p. 69.

Some of the difficulties which arise, and suggested steps to take are presented by Featherstone:

> More frequent assessment and evaluations of school progress need to be made with the slow-learning pupil than with the brighter pupil. There are two main reasons for this. A great many slow pupils have experienced much more than their share of general frustration and inadequacy even in the best managed schools. Emotional security and a sense of adequacy and acceptability are less likely to be theirs. They need more frequent assurance that what they are doing is satisfactory. A further reason for frequent evaluation is that the slow pupil is somewhat prone to be slipshod in his work, to feel that the end justifies the means, to be content with the approximate result, a reasonable workable product, or a partial solution."[1]

Bernard has drawn together and presented the following "suggestions for dealing with slow learners" as based on characteristics of these students:

1. The slow learner will be more strongly motivated by praise than by criticism.

2. Examples, experiences, demonstrations, and illustrations serve to make learnings concrete.

3. Repetition of facts in different contexts and drill on fundamentals (such as numbers and English usage) will be helpful.

4. Emphasis should be placed on the development of traits of punctuality, neatness, health, etc., with specific suggestions for practical applications.

5. Slow developmental rates require patience.

6. Specific direction and prescription are desirable and gratifying.

7. Reading and number work should emphasize everyday situations, such as reading signs and directions, making change. Illustrations should be simple and specific.

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[1] Ibid., p. 68.

8. Abilities in various areas - music, manual arts, arithmetic, reading - will vary widely, and an attempt must be made to capitalize on pupils' strengths.

9. Promotion must of necessity be largely dependent on social and chronological age. Grading must be based on personality growth rather than on academic achievement.

10. Immediate rewards, short-term goals, praise, and encouragement are effective motivators. The slow learner appreciates being told what to do.

11. School work should be closely related to the simple occupations the slow learner will probably have as an adult.[1]

Considerations of such judgments as Featherstone and Bernard have made, as presented in this section, have resulted in the development of a special program for the retarded student in the Des Moines public schools. The next chapter describes this program from its inception to the time of this writing. The various special features of the program are described, and the attempt is made to arrive at an assessment of its effectiveness.

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[1]Harold W. Barnard, Psychology of Learning and Teaching (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1954), pp. 217-218.

CHAPTER III

THE SPECIAL PROGRAM IN THE DES MOINES PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In this chapter are presented a description of the organization, a brief history, and the current provisions pertaining to the special education program in the public schools of Des Moines. Sources included publications and documents from the Office of the Superintendent and from the office of the Director of the Department of Pupil Adjustment of the city schools. In addition, numerous interviews were held with the Superintendent of Schools, the Director of the Department of Pupil Adjustment, and with teachers who have been active in the special education program for many years.

I. ORGANIZATION AND HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM

The school year of 1914 saw the first organized attempt to meet the needs of the retarded child in the Des Moines Public Schools. Slow learning pupils were recognized by their teachers and principals as being in need of a special program.

After lengthy discussions by school personnel a class devoted to the needs and problems of these retarded children was established at Garfield School. The class was ungraded, and was organized and taught by Mary G. Diemer. Emphasis was on the basic skills, with much individual instruction. This class continued for five years. In 1919 and 1920 classes for

slow learners were offered in several elementary schools, but were brought together later on in the old Howe School building.

Classes for below average junior high pupils were established at Amos Hiatt Junior High School in 1920. These classes were later moved to Cary School and, later in 1920, other classes of this type were organized in several junior high schools. At that time the direction of the special program was carried out through the Attendance Department in conjunction with the special education services.

In 1930 the Attendance Department and special education services were consolidated into the Department of Pupil Adjustment. Also in the fall of 1930, a bulletin was issued stating the program to be followed for the organization of special classes for overage pupils in addition to the special education program. This bulletin[1] states the general pattern for educational divisions within the Des Moines Public Schools. The elementary school, kindergarten through sixth grade, ages five to twelve inclusive; junior high school, grades seven through nine; ages twelve to fifteen inclusive; senior high school, grades ten through twelve, ages fifteen to eighteen inclusive. The bulletin further states that for various reasons, many students are not included in this general pattern. Among the reasons given are deficiency in intellectual endowment and

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[1] Bulletin Number 18 (Des Moines Public Schools, September 23, 1930), pp. 1, 2, and 4.

lack of sufficiently rich background of experience in the home environment.

Therefore, the organization of the special pre-junior classes provides a two-fold purpose. First, to help the pre-junior student, and secondly, to relieve the regular elementary teacher of this often troublesome problem and allow the teacher better to adapt the instruction to the more homogenous group remaining.

A thorough testing program was provided. It was a continuing program with testing each semester. Standard group tests of mental ability for grades 1B and 6A, standard group survey test of educational achievement grade 3A were a regular part of the program. Individual tests for mental ability were given for special problems in all grades for purposes of segregating in developmental(sub-normal) groups.

The bulletin of 1930 also provided for classification of the candidates for special classes in the following groups: Group A was the special promotion group. This included overage pupils in grades four to six with an educational achievement test score above the norm for eleven years and an intelligence quotient of 75 or more on the group mental tests.

Group B, the pre-junior high school group, were the over-age group in grades four to six inclusive. The educational achievement test score would be below the norm for eleven years. The group mental tests must indicate an intelligence quotient between 70 and 80. The last group, Group C, was the Developmental

group. These children were over-age in grades 1B and 3A inclusive. Upon recommendation of the elementary school principal these children were given an individual Binet test by a competent examiner. For this group the results from the test would range from I.Q. 55 to 70. The bulletin recommended that children with I.Q.'s below 55 should probably be considered institutional cases and not enrolled public schools.

The program as outlined in this bulletin continued until 1940 when over-age groups in junior high schools were organized. Special classes for slow learners and remedial reading groups for normal pupils were substituted for the pre-junior classification. The requirements for admittance remained, for the most part, the same. Also in 1940, the program at the secondary level was instituted to care for those students who might possibly be able to return to regular school and those students who are capable of completing one year of high school under the special education system.

II. CURRENT PROVISIONS FOR THE SPECIAL STUDENT

In the Des Moines public schools the mentally retarded child is given an opportunity to follow an academic program that meets his needs. That is, all work is adjusted to his maturation level. The child is accepted where he is, physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally. The teacher helps him to develop skills, attitudes and habits acceptable to himself and society.

The retarded child is much like other children, but educationally he presents specific problems of learning. The curriculum is planned to care for these problems. The slow learning child is not expected to handle concepts as broad or complex as the so-called normal child.

Class programs are flexible, the child's attention span is short and class periods are arranged accordingly. Academic work is often interspersed with physical activities to relieve mental fatigue; with the younger child these activities may employ the use of field trips, arts and crafts, music, dramatics, rhythms, dances and games.

As in all educational programs, educators of the slow learning child have set up essential objectives. The first step is to produce boys and girls who are socially well adjusted and who demonstrate the acquisition of good work habits. The ultimate goal is to give the retarded child the satisfaction of self realization, good human relationships, civic responsibility, and economic security.

These backward and retarded children are usually first noticed by the classroom teacher because of their inability to adjust in either or both the social or educational environment. If this retardation seems to be severe enough to warrant referral to the school psychologist, the parent should have been invited to the school for a discussion of the child's problems. The classroom teacher and principal must accept the first responsibility of interpreting lack of progress to the parent.

The child is then referred to the Department of Pupil Adjustment for study and tests.

The referral blanks are filled out jointly by the principal and classroom teacher, giving the child's total personality pattern, results of formal tests administered, the health record, work habits, and emotional adjustment.

For practical school purposes, the school psychologist begins the diagnosis of backwardness with an objective measure. This measurement is derived from individually administered clinical tests of general intelligence. In Des Moines either the Revised Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale or the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children is used.[1]

The psychologist also studies the child's social and educational development, his health record, record of standard tests, family history and developmental data, and the record of social agency registrations. After this study, frequently, one or more of the projective types of instruments is administered to supplement the intelligence scales.

The clinical test are regarded as only a beginning of evaluation. Equally important are the observations of teachers, parents, social workers, school nurses, family physicians, and other clinicians.

A summarization of all the observations named, with the

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[1] Manual for Teachers of Special Class for Retarded Pupils (Dept. of Pupil Adjustment, Des Moines Public Schools 1950), pp. 5, 6.

clinical data and the pupil's total personality pattern, is written into a case study by the school psychologist, and, with recommendations, is returned to the principal and classroom teacher.[1] If all data obtained indicate that the youngster is a mentally retarded child, the recommendations will be that this pupil be transferred to a special class where there are special provisions for his experiences and educational training.

After the child has been recommended for special class placement, the school again must assume responsibility for the interpretation of his educational and social needs to the parent. The special class program should be pictured as an opportunity for maximum educational and social growth.[2] The pupil's placement should be explained in terms of long-time goals and should never be represented as a temporary remedial procedure. Nevertheless, the parent should be aware that the special class program provides for a continuity of experiences at each school level--elementary, junior and senior high.

The school program for children diagnosed as retarded and assigned to special classes in Des Moines offers continuing educational facilities, from the time of assignment through the tenth grade of senior high school.

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[1] The case studies presented in Chapter II are illustrative of this.

[2] Ibid.

At the elementary level the groups are referred to as Developmental B classes. Admission to these classes is sometimes affected as early as seven years of age, but the preferable age range is considered to be from eight to twelve. Ordinarily, even the significantly retarded child may benefit from the opportunities for social growth in the kindergarten and the reading readiness program at the first grade level.

At the age of twelve, the pupils are transferred to a special ungraded center which is now located at Whittier School. Here the children are offered a modified junior high program and take part in activities that will prepare them for the junior high school placement.

As soon after the age of thirteen as seem consistent with the child's maturity and progress, a transfer to a junior high 7B class is effected. Special classes are graded from 7B to 9A levels.

For those who have made satisfactory social and educational progress, tenth grade special classes are maintained at two senior high schools in Des Moines. Most special class pupils will reach the legal school leaving age of sixteen before completing the special ninth grade. It may be desirable to encourage the least capable pupils to discontinue their formal schooling at the completion of the junior high school program and accept the services of Vocational Rehabilitation or State Employment Office in helping them to find employment.

The Development B classes are now accommodating more

than two hundred and fifty pupils in the Des Moines schools. Classes are maintained in eleven schools and employ seventeen teachers. Six of the eleven schools have a two-room center where the younger children (eight to ten) are in one room and the older children (ten to twelve) are in the other room. In the two-room centers the teachers often arrange for the pupils to work together on various programs, units of work, music, dancing, etc. The average pupil load is approximately fifteen pupils per teacher, and every effort is made to keep the classes below twenty.

In order to meet each child's individual needs, the teacher plans groupings within the class for instructional purposes. There are wide variations in the levels of mental maturity of the members of such a group. There are also other factors taken into consideration when sub-grouping. These factors may involve social maturity, faulty habit formations, and emotional disturbances. It is not uncommon in a Developmental B class to find four or more reading groups, and an equal number of groups in the other skill subjects.

There are no grade divisions. A pupil may be reading first grade material and doing arithmetic at a third grade level. Achievement tests are administered twice a year to the older pupils and their progress is recorded at grade levels on a permanent record form. Each child is allowed to progress as rapidly as his ability will permit. Otherwise, the classroom organization does not differ greatly from that of an undepartmentalized

elementary school class. Activities in the common branches of learning occupy the morning session, with the afternoon being devoted to the development of social studies projects, handwork, music, and informal activities.

At age twelve years, the Development A children from all parts of the city come to Whittier School for a one-year period. A few may enter directly from the regular grades. These may be boys and girls who have recently entered the Des Moines Schools, or who have been borderline cases and are unable to make further progress with regular classes.

At Whittier, the child's academic work is adjusted to his needs. He may be only ready for beginning reading or he may have third grade ability. Seldom does a child enter Whittier who has progressed beyond a third grade level of reading. This is true in all academic subjects. There is always a wide variation of intelligence and social maturity and these factors are all taken into account when planning the child's program. Since the mentally retarded child requires a great deal of individual attention, the size of the class must be kept small. The Whittier program is planned to give the child the same kind of experiences that he would get in the upper unit of the elementary school.

Since mentally retarded children, before entering special education, have met with many discouraging situations, it is necessary to give them experiences where they can meet with success. This is accomplished by giving them motor activities.

At Whittier, boys are given shop and practical arts, while girls are given practical experiences in homemaking. These are not only good morale builders, but give them introductory work in these subjects which will be taught by teachers of regular classes in junior high school. If, at the end of one year at Whittier, the child is able to take his place socially with regular junior high boys and girls, he is promoted to 7B Special.

At the end of the Developmental A program (about thirteen years of age) the special class pupil enters one of the four junior high schools which maintains a special class program. Three of these four special class departments have four teachers full time, while the fourth has only two teachers giving full time to this work.

The program varies some for each school due to facilities available, but all are basically similar. All programs include daily classes for all three grades (seventh, eighth, and ninth) in English, arithmetic, and social studies taught by special class teachers.

Following the junior high program a series of tests is administered, and those students identified who might be in a position to benefit from one year of special education at the Senior High level. At this level one teacher is giving full time to the special education program. The child is in a homeroom with other special students and his program is built around his abilities whenever possible. The course of study consists of

English and history taught for the special students, plus two electives. After completing the tenth grade special level, some of the students are permitted to try regular school work. This decision is based on the success of the student academically and socially in the tenth grade.

Chapter IV presents details of this program as carried out at North High School.

CHAPTER IV

THE SPECIAL STUDENT AT NORTH HIGH SCHOOL

In this chapter are included a description of the program for the special student at North High School and evidence related to the effectiveness of the program. As the writer had taught at North High School in the special program for five years, many of the details presented are based on his experience. This program has developed as attemps were made to carry out various recommendations contained in a manual prepared by the Department of Pupil Adjustment.[1] The administration of North High School, teachers, and pupils in the special program all cooperated in furnishing the information brought together in this chapter.

I. THE SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM AT NORTH HIGH SCHOOL

North High School is one of five co-educational public high schools in the city of Des Moines. The enrollment for the 1956-57 school year was approximately 1,100 students, with 600 girls and 500 boys. The students are drawn generally from a middle-class area in the north and northwest parts of Des Moines.

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[1] *Manual for Teachers of Special Classes for Retarded Pupils* (Department of Pupil Adjustment, Des Moines Public Schools, 1950).

The special education program at North High School was started in the fall of 1947. This program provided for assignment to a special homeroom, with two periods of the day devoted to special education work in English and history. There was also time allotted for guidance within this homeroom. Physical education and two periods of elective classroom work are taken at the regular school level. The regular school work was elected in accordance with the interests and capabilities of the student.

The special education program consists of three phases, each of which will be considered separately. They are the guidance, curriculum, and extra-curricular activities.

The guidance counselor for this special student usually will discuss situations with the student about once a week. The writer often arranged the counseling session into three parts: (1) Regular school work, (2) special education work, and (3) personal problems.

Analysis of progress in the special education work is reviewed, and according to the individual, emphasis is placed on either preparation for regular school or termination of school at the end of the tenth grade.

More time is devoted to personal problems in the counseling period than to anything else. As the manual states:

> The teacher will need to recognize that overcoming feelings of insecurity and the formation of more adequate social habits and attitudes are as important as the development of skills; it is even more certain that each

type of development is intrinsic to the other.[1]

The personal problems of the special education student evolve to a certain extent from the problem of insecurity. This insecurity may be intensified by a frustration in achievement. The general attitude of inferiority seems to be foremost in the special student's mind.

The curriculum program of the department is classified into two areas, special and regular. The special program is English and history for one year.

The manual states:

> The English program in the special classes of the secondary schools should include all of the areas of the Language Arts. Of foremost importance is the improvement of reading skills. A definite amount of time in the English schedule should be allocated to directed reading activities.[2]

As for the other areas of the Language Arts, the manual states:

> Reading, however, is not the only type of experience in which retarded pupils should participate in a good language program. The use of language is undoubtedly one of the most important activities in which a child engages. It should be stressed that Language is a social tool, and it is important for these pupils to learn "when" as well as "how" to listen, talk, or write.[3]

The curriculum suggested for the special English class to include under oral English: reports, story telling, giving directions, speech improvements, use of the telephone, book

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[1] Ibid., p. 4. [2] Ibid., p. 47 [3] Ibid. 48

reviews, and preparation for employment interviews.[1]

The written English curriculum would cover: friendly letters, capitalization, punctuation, outlines, word study, grammar fundamentals, spelling, and handwriting.

The social studies area of the manual suggests the following:

> The educational objectives for the mentally retarded do not differ, in general from the objectives for all children--in which we strive for growth in each individual's capacities to enjoy, to share in and contribute to worthwhile activities of his environment. While they are limited in their capacities, mentally retarded children are capable of contributing in some degree to the normal activities of life.
>
> In view of the retarded pupils' reading limitations, their teachers must necessarily draw upon the personal and classroom experiences of the retarded in developing the social studies program. The use of visual aids also assumes greater importance for retarded readers in the social studies area.[2]

Flexibility of the program and "unit of work" plan has been the best type of organization for the social studies area.

The suggestions for the curriculum of the special program mentioned in the preceding paragraphs are for the most part carried out. The English curriculum can in reality be utilized to a better degree when the special class is divided into two groups--those intending to continue in the regular school program following the tenth grade and those who will be terminated at the end of the tenth grade.

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 30.

For those students who plan to continue school, emphasis, is placed on grammar fundamentals, vocabulary, and reading. Word study, spelling, work application forms and oral English are emphasized for the terminal group.

The social studies curriculum, as practiced, utilizes the unit method. A study is made of early American History. Following this, a considerable amount of time is devoted to citizenship and responsibilities of the individual in the democratic society. This is covered through four units, the local, county, state, and national government.

It is possible in the social studies class to arrange numerous field trips. The City Hall, County Courthouse, and State House are visited annually.

Visual aids are utilized whenever practical. There are a wide range of films available through the audio-visual department. The writer also uses the current events booklet, Read.

The courses from the regular curriculum for the special education student are selected with his interest and capabilities considered. The regular courses are not organized to handle the mentally retarded child. It has been the observation of the writer that many teachers develop a resistance to the special student for fear their subject area may become a "dumping ground" for the mentally retarded.

Generally the special student finds that his best field in the regular subject area is Typing 1. He seems to be able

to comprehend the keyboard with moderate success; however, this takes a considerable amount of work outside the regular classroom. Before and after school time is allotted for typing students and if the special student expects to learn to type, this time should be utilized every day.

From personal interviews with other faculty members the writer can say that generally 75 per cent of the passing grades given to special students in the regular subjects are based almost entirely on effort.

Extra Curricular Activities

The special student is given every opportunity to participate in the extra-curricular program at North High School. This program covers two general areas: student organizations and the athletic program.

The special homeroom is always represented on the student council. Homeroom officers, president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer, are elected by popular vote at the beginning of each semester, with the president serving as student council representative.

There are various committees in the program that the special students have served with. Service and Red Cross, Ticket and Usher, and Halls Committees, to mention a few of these. On one occasion a member of the special room was vice-chairman of the Social Committee.

The club program always has a number of the special students among their membership. The social clubs for the girls

are Cosmopolitan and Sub-Deb. Academic clubs for both boys and girls are: El Circulo Espanol (Spanish), Chembiophysics Club (Science), Pencil Pushers (English) and Societas Romana (Latin).

The athletic program at North High School provides opportunities for both boys and girls to develop prowess from the physical and competitive aspect. Although in the special education department the boys have over-shadowed the girls, there is still active participation by both sexes in the program.

The boys may participate in football, basketball, track, baseball, swimming, wrestling, cross-country, tennis, and golf. Every school year there are usually three or four boys who make the varsity or junior varsity teams. In one respect the special room reached its climax from the athletic standpoint when a former member of the homeroom was elected co-captain of the football team and selected on the Des Moines All-City team as chosen by the local newspaper.

The athletic program for the girls consists of swimming, rope jumping, golf, tennis, and the intramural department. The girls have not been as active as the boys in athletic participation. None of them have been selected on the varsity team.

II. STUDENTS IN THE PROGRAM

The special education program at North High School had been started in 1947. No special effort had been made to assess

the effectiveness of the program. As part of this study, it was decided to determine how the student fared in this program. This was done by looking at the success these students had in the two courses they could elect from the regular school offerings, by checking the holding power of the program by determining the percentage of dropouts, and by asking the students themselves certain questions about the program.

The school records were examined to determine the grades received by twenty-five special education students in various elected subjects during the 1955-1956 school year. The results of this are presented in Table I. It will be noted that the record is generally one of failure: 82 per cent of the grades received were either "below average" or "failing." There were no "excellent" grades, and only three (out of fifty) "above average." This must be read with the realization referred to previously that many of the teachers reported that they graded the students generously. Certainly there is little room for a feeling of achievement on the part of the special students, when the grades received are so low.

School records were also examined to determine the rate of dropout of the students in the special program. Fifty special students were selected from those who had been in the program over a three-year period, from 1953 to 1956. They were classified into groups according to I.Q. scores: 51-59, 60-65, 66-70, 71-75, and 76-80. Then those who had dropped out were noted and placed in the I.Q. group. Percentages of those

dropping out were then determined. The results are presented in Table II. Of the fifty studied, 36 per cent dropped out of school during or at the end of the tenth grade. There is very definite relationship between I.Q. score and continuation in school. This certainly raised doubt as to the effectiveness of the attempts to make school useful to these students. It would suggest that something more should be done.

TABLE I

GRADES RECEIVED IN VARIOUS SUBJECTS BY TWENTY-FIVE SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS AT NORTH HIGH SCHOOL, DES MOINES, IOWA, 1955-1956

Subject	Grade Received				
	1 (Excellent)	2 (Above) (Average)	3 (Average)	4 (Below) (Average)	5 (Failing)
Typing	0	1	4	2	7
Art	0	0	0	3	3
Commercial Arithmetic	0	1	0	1	5
Woodshop	0	0	1	4	2
Homemaking	0	0	1	2	2
Spanish	0	0	0	1	1
Bookkeeping	0	1	0	5	2
Total	0	3	6	19	22
Per Cent	0	6	12	38	44

TABLE II

NUMBER AND PER CENT OF DROPOUTS BY IQ SCORE FROM GROUP OF FIFTY SPECIAL STUDENTS AT NORTH HIGH SCHOOL, DES MOINES, IOWA, 1955-1956

IQ Group	Students in Group	Dropouts in Group	Per Cent of Dropouts
76-80	10	1	10
71-75	9	2	22
66-70	12	7	58
60-65	15	5	33
51-59	4	3	75
Total	50	18	36

In order to get the reactions of the students who were in the special program, interviews were held with all those enrolled in the spring of 1957. Twenty of these students had been in the special program for one year, and eighteen had been in the program for one semester. Certain questions were asked of both groups, and additional questions were asked the members of the first semester group.

The majority of both groups said that the elective courses were too hard for them. Of the first semester students, 15 of the 18 so reported; of the second semester students, 14 of the 20 said the courses were too hard. The attitude has changed, but this is still a large majority who found the work difficult.

Six of the 18 first semester students said they would like to graduate from high school, while 11 of the 20 second semester students so reported. This is considerable change in expectations, and is assumed to be due to further acquaintance with the school and more of a feeling of being a part of it.

When asked, "Do you feel different because you are in "special", only 4 of the 18 first semester students said they did, but 12 of the 20 second semester students said they did.

One-third of both groups reported that they were employed part time. Five of the first semester students had made plans for the future, while 9 of the second semester students had made plans. Part of this making of plans is no doubt due to greater maturity, and part may be due to the influence of the school program, as there are many discussions about planning with individual students and in the homeroom.

The feeling that the school program had been of help was expressed by most of both groups. Sixteen of the 18 first semester students said it had, and 18 of the 20 second semester students so reported.

A number of additional questions were asked of the students in the first semester group. Only 4 of the 18 said that they found the special classes too difficult. Thirteen of the 18 thought that the special classes were better than the regular classes. Only 2 of these students expected to graduate from high school.

From these interviews, and from the data presented about grades received and dropouts, a general picture may be drawn of a feeling of hoplessness on the part of these students. The bright spot is the expressed feeling that the special classes are considerably better than the elective classes. The general attitude toward school is still a negative one (only 8 of 18 "like" school), and this cannot result in very high motivation or interest.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to review the development and operation of the special education program for retarded children at North High School and to determine how satisfactorily it was operating. This involved a review of the special education program in the Des Moines Public Schools, the preparation of a description of the program at North High School, and the presentation of evidence which indicates its effectiveness. This was accomplished through interviews with school personnel, study of documents and school records, interviews with students in the program, and the experience of the writer who was a teacher in this program.

I. SUMMARY

The nature of the special student and recommendations for conditions of his education were presented in Chapter II.

The historical development and current program for the education of retarded children are presented in Chapter III. The first provisions of this kind in the Des Moines schools were made in 1914, at the elementary school level. Classes for the junior high school level were introduced in 1920. The one-year program at North High School was established in the fall of 1947. This program is described in Chapter IV.

The student in the special program at North High

School is with a special group for homeroom, English, and Social Studies. One teacher is responsible for all three. In addition, the student elects two other courses from the regular school program. The student and the group also participate in all other aspects of the regular school program, including student council, extra-curricular activities, and athletics. At the end of the one year of the special program, the student may continue in high school in the regular program and try to graduate. The special program does not extend beyond the tenth grade.

The evidence regarding the adequacy of the program was not encouraging. The grades in regular subjects received by twenty-five special students were tabulated, and it was found that 82 per cent of the grades received were either "below average" or "failing." There were no "excellent" grades. This situation is probably worse than it appears, as the teachers in general said that they did not grade the specials as severely as the other students.

Thirty-six per cent of fifty students dropped out of school during or at the end of the tenth grade. In relation to I.Q. scores, the lower the score, the greater the amount of dropout.

The students expressed some appreciation of the special program, but the large majority found their regular classes too hard. Their attitudes toward school and their expectations of

success were representative of a very poor morale. The general reaction could be characterized as one of discouragement and lack of hope.

II. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the findings of this report the following conclusions are made:

1. The special classes designed for the retarded student were relatively effective, but the assigning of the student to two classes in the "regular" program is not successful. It is recommended that the special program be expanded to include the full school day, except in those cases where there is reason to believe the student may be successful.

2. The program did not retain as many students as would be desirable, and the dropout rate increased as the I.Q. scores went down. It is recommended that more attention be given to providing educational experiences for those students at the lower range of intelligence, if they are to be in the program.

3. The failing and near-failing grades received, plus the general atmosphere of discouragement on the part of the students do not indicate very good learning conditions. It is recommended that success and failure judgments be made more in terms of the capacity of these students to succeed. It may be that the full-day special program as recommended in "2" above would change the atmosphere to a more positive one.

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